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ABSTRACT

The norms of social responsibility and reciprocity govern altruistic behavior. Children and adults show a consistent developmental trend in comparisons of their responses to positive reciprocal situations and their subsequent altruism. Research indicates, however, that children, given the choice to behaviorally aid a needy individual, choose more often to give reciprocally, suggesting a marked difference between the perceptions of verbal and behavioral motivational cues for children and adults. College students (N=36) completed verbal and behavioral tasks to compare adult verbal judgments and donating behavior in response to cues pertaining to the norm of social responsibility and the norm of reciprocity. Differences in the subject response sets to verbal and behavioral tasks were also observed. In the verbal task, subjects deemed that donors in vignettes giving in response to need were more meritorious than donors who had helped reciprocally. However, when given a behavioral donating task, the subjects changed their response pattern dramatically, helping another unseen peer who could reciprocate their action instead of helping a more needy peer. Debriefing responses suggested that for some subjects a "double standard" exists in real life help-giving situations as compared to verbal judgment of merit. For other subjects, a misperception of the behavioral task resulted in the adoption of a "game norm" rather than a "helping norm." (Author)

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RECIPROCITY AND DEPENDENCY CONSIDERATIONS IN ADULT DONATING AND VERBAL JUDGMENTS

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Introduction

The norm of social responsibility and the norm of reciprocity govern altruistic behavior. The norm of social responsibility posits that one gives to another in need with no thought of reward, whereas the norm of reciprocity states that one should give only when future help is expected or help has been previously received.

Children and adults show a consistent developmental trend when their responses to positive reciprocal situations and giving in response to need are compared. Both groups verbally regard giving to a needy other as more favorable than giving reciprocally. This trend towards <u>verbal</u> adherence to the norm of social responsibility increases with age, and it may be that <u>verbally</u>, the norm of social responsibility is more salient than the norm of reciprocity.

However, subject preference for the norms change completely when cues for positive reciprocity and dependency are compared as motivators for a <u>behavioral</u> task. Children given the choice to <u>behaviorally</u> aid a needy other or to aid someone who could reciprocate their help, chose more often to give reciprocally. These two developmental trends show a marked difference between the perceptions of verbal and behavioral motivational cues.

There are several alternative explanations for these developmental changes. One cogent explanation points to a possible "double standard" learned from adults who, while giving reciprocally, laud giving to the needy. The following experiment attempts to see if the "double standard" exists and to delineate the variables in the subjects perception between verbal and behavioral judgments.

METHOD

EIGHTEEN MALE AND EIGHTEEN FEMALE UNDERGRADUATES VOLUNTEERED TO PARTICIPATE IN AN EXPERIMENT ENTITLED A "PROBLEM SOLVING TASK." THE SUBJECTS RECEIVED ONE OF TWO TASKS IN BALANCED ORDER OF PRESENTATION. A VERBAL TASK WAS PRESENTED WHICH CONSISTED OF SIX PAIRS OF VIGNETTES. EACH PAIR UTILIZED TWO OR THREE SENTENCES DESCRIBING A SITUATION WHERE A SAME SEX DONOR EITHER HELPED SOMEONE IN NEED OR SOMEONE HELPED HE OR SHE PREVIOUSLY. THE VIGNETTES WERE READ BY THE EXPERIMENTER AND THE SUBJECT WAS ASKED TO AWARD FIVE MERIT POINTS BETWEEN EACH PAIR OF VIGNETTES; THUS FORCING THE SUBJECT TO INDICATE NEED OR RECIPROCITY AS THE MORE MERITORIOUS ACT.

THE DONATING TASK WAS A "MYSTERY" FORMAT WHERE THE SUBJECT WAS TOLD THAT S/HE WAS ONE OF THREE "SUBJECTS" AND THAT S/HE HAD TO SOLVE A PUZZLE WITH DIFFERING AMOUNTS OF CLUES DISTRIBUTED RANDOMLY BETWEEN THEM. TWO DONATING OPPORTUNITIES WERE PRESENTED TO THE SUBJECT. THE FIRST DONATING OPPORTUNITY ALLOWED THE SUBJECT (B) TO HELP A FICTITIOUS PARTICIPANT A, WHO HAD TEN CLUES (FIVE NOVEL CLUES AND FIVE THE SAME AS B) OR TO HELP FICTITIOUS PARTICIPANT (WHO HAD ONLY FIVE CLUES (ALL OF WHICH WERE REDUNDANT WITH B'S CLUES). THIS ESTABLISHED BEHAVIORALLY A SITUATIONAL COMPARISON OF HELPING A PERSON IN NEED VERSUS HELPING SOMEONE OUT OF RECIPROCITY.

THE SECOND DONATING OPPORTUNITY WAS GIVEN WHEN THE SUBJECT HAD ARRIVED AT A SOLUTION TO THE "MYSTERY". SUBJECT B WAS GIVEN THE CHOICE OF TRADING HIS/HER ANSWER WITH SUBJECT A, WHO HAD SET HIS ANSWER TO HIM/HER, OR TO SUBJECT C WHO WAS NOT FINISHED AND WAS THUS MORE NEEDY. (B WAS TOLD "IT MIGHT HELP HIM TO HAVE AN ANSWER".) THIS AGAIN PRESENTED A CHOICE SITUATION FOR SUBJECT B

TO CHOOSE TO HELP A PERSON IN NEED OR TO RETURN A FAVOR, THUS SHOWING RECIPROCITY. THIS SECOND DONATION OPPORTUNITY WAS THOUGHT TO BE LESS COSTLY THAN THE FIRST.

AFTER THIS TRADE, THE SUBJECT WAS ASKED WHAT THEY THOUGHT THE PURPOSE OF THE EXPERIMENT WAS AND WHETHER THEIR ORIENTATION TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM WAS INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL. THEN, THE SUBJECT WAS DEBRIEFED AND ASKED IF S/HE REALIZED C NEEDED MORE ASSISTANCE THAN A DID IN THE DONATING TASK.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF SUBJECTS
PREFERRING CUES FOR
SOCIAL NORMS OF ALTRUISM

	NORM OF RECIPROCITY	NORM OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
VERBAL TASK	5	31
FIRST BEHAVIORAL TASK	34	2
SECOND BEHAVIORAL TASK	32	4

Results

There was strong support for differences in verbal judgment and actual helpgiving. As shown in Table 1, subjects were much more likely in the verbal task to award more points to [$F(35) = 5.48$, $p < .01$] and indicate superior merit of [$F(35) = 6.62$, $p < .01$] donors who gave assistance or items of value to a needy recipient rather than donors who gave reciprocally. However, in the behavioral task they were more likely to help a recipient who could reciprocate rather than a needy recipient during the clue trade [$F(35) = 11.48$, $p < .01$] and the answer trade [$F(35) = 6.17$, $p < .01$]. There were no gender or task order effects.

Discussion

The results of this experiment yield differing findings for the verbal and behavioral measures. There were no gender effects or effects due to order of the presentation of the tasks. Overwhelmingly, subjects in the verbal task responded by assigning more merit to dependency cues rather than reciprocity cues. However, when the subjects were presented with a behavioral situation in which they could actually help a participant in need, the subjects overwhelmingly chose to help the subject who could reciprocate their help.

Normative control is evidenced in this experiment, but it is not clear that one social norm is necessarily more salient to verbal or behavioral judgments. Debriefing indicated that many subjects had not realized that C was in need. Once they realized it, they felt guilty.

Two interpretations exist for the results. It may be that the same social norms may not be applied to real life situations as to verbal judgments. This points to a kind of double-standard in adults; a hypocritical attitude between verbal and behavioral actions. The second interpretation would be that when the subject perceived the task as requiring helpgiving, rather than as a game, social norms of altruism would have been used. With this experiment, the use of the "mystery" solving task may have elicited a game norm behavior distinct from a helpgiving norm.

These results may have implications for the development of altruism. One implication is that children should be taught in early childhood the importance of verbal and behavioral correspondence.

SECONDLY, CUES FOR ALTRUISTIC RESPONDING WOULD BE UTILIZED IF HELPGIVING SITUATIONS ARE PERCEIVED AS HELPGIVING SITUATIONS AND NOT VIEWED AS SEPARATE FROM GAMES AND COMPETITION IN REAL LIFE SITUATIONS. FURTHER RESEARCH NEEDS TO UNCOVER THE MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS BEHIND THE SUBJECTS' RESPONSES TO HELPGIVING AND BEHIND SUBJECTS' PERCEPTION OF A CONTRIVED SITUATION.